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Derrick White

Florida Atlantic University, Derrick.E.White@dartmouth.edu

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Audacious Visions:

The Intellectual-Activist Legacies of W.E.B. DuBois, the Institute of the Black World, and Walter Rodney

Derrick E. White

Scholar of modern Black history with an emphasis on intellectual, political, and sports history. He is the author of *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Florida, 2011) and co-editor of *Winning While Losing: Civil Rights, The Conservative Movement and the Presidency from Nixon to Obama* (Florida, 2014). He is currently working on a book tentatively titled, *Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Florida A & M and the Rise and Fall of a Black College Football Dynasty*.

By 1969 the nature and terrain of the Black freedom movement had profoundly changed. The nonviolent direct action portion or “classical phase” of the movement had led to clear political successes with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.¹ The movement had also made tremendous inroads in changing public racial discourse. Racial epithets were less acceptable in polite or public conversation. Despite these achievements, Martin Luther King, Jr. asked, before his assassination, profound questions about the next stage of the movement. King’s last book, *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community* called for a new phase of the civil rights movement that addressed the institutional legacies of slavery and segregation. King focused on the “realization of equality,” instead of equal opportunity. “A society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him,” King wrote. Yet, when he suggested this next episode of the movement White supporters “had quietly disappeared.”² King realized before his death that the “color-line,” despite the civil rights victories, was persistent.

King’s assassination fatally weakened the already declining classical phase of the civil right movement. The movement had lost momentum because of the effects

1 Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Commentary*, February 1965. <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/from-protest-to-politics-the-future-of-the-civil-rights-movement/> Accessed August 26, 2013.

2 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, 2010), 94, 4.

of the Black Power movement, the Vietnam War, and the desertion of many White liberals. Moreover, the racist bigotry and de jure segregation policies that had fueled the classical phase of the movement gave way to the realization of a nuanced racism deeply embedded in structures and institutions of American society. Institutionalized racism found in wealth, health care, the criminal justice system, and educational disparities proved more difficult to defeat than “white” and “colored” signs. It was clear to many activists that new ideas and new strategies were needed to overcome the increasing complexities presented by structural racism.³

In the decade after King’s assassination, activists and intellectuals formed new organizations designed to articulate, what historian Robin D. G. Kelley has called “freedom dreams,” or “the different cognitive maps of the future” produced by activists and social movements.⁴ According to Kelley, dreams of the future are forged through “political engagement.” Social movements create hard students with expansive visions consisting of new ideas, theories, and questions.⁵ The end of the classical phase of the civil rights movement meant opportunities for activists to develop new concepts. Some of these novel imaginings emerged from the same place that produced Martin Luther King and housed the offices of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee – Atlanta, Georgia.

For decades Atlanta served as a key location from which intellectual-activists dreamed of a new world. Martin Luther King, for example, envisioned a just world from the pews of Ebenezer Baptist Church and in the classrooms of Morehouse College. Thus, it should be of no surprise that during the 1970s Atlanta again was the home to organizations that sought new concepts for a new decade. While SNCC barely survived the dawn of the new decade, other organizations such as Amiri Baraka’s Congress

3 Andrew Grant-Thomas and John A. Powell, “Toward a Structural Racism Framework,” *Poverty and Race* 15, no. 6 (2006): 3-6. Kenneth Osgood, and Derrick E. White, “The Paradox of Success: Civil Rights and the Presidency in a New Era,” in *Winning While Losing: Civil Rights, the Conservative Movement, and the Presidency from Nixon to Obama* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 1 – 25.

4 Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 10.

5 Ibid. 8. George L. Ruffin describes Frederick Douglass as a “hard student” in the “Introduction” to *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1892, 2003), 7.

of African Peoples called for unity in the halls of the Atlanta University Center.⁶ No organization, however, shaped the local and international visions of liberation more than the Institute of the Black World (IBW).

The Institute of the Black World created a space for intellectual-activists to tackle the complex realities facing the African diaspora caused by structural racism. Founded in 1969 and located in Atlanta, the IBW was formed when historian, theologian, and Spelman College faculty member Vincent Harding, and literary critic and Morehouse college professor, Stephen Henderson discussed the meaning of Black Studies and Black Power in wake of King's assassination. Harding and Henderson called on their colleagues at the Atlanta University Center (AUC) - Morehouse College, Spelman College, Morris Brown College, Clark College, Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center - and scholars from across the nation and the diaspora to join them in a new organization dedicated to using their minds "in the service of the Black community."⁷ The IBW was initially a component of the Martin Luther King Center, led by Coretta Scott King, but the two organizations split over analytical, financial, and ideological differences.⁸ Under Harding and Henderson's leadership, the IBW assembled, perhaps, the greatest collection of activist intellectuals in post-World War II America. At various points during the organization's history, the IBW's roll of associates, contributors, supporters, and donors included Ossie Davis, St. Clair Drake, C.L.R. James, Sylvia Wynter, and Walter Rodney among numerous others.

The IBW was inspired by Du Bois's Atlanta sociological laboratory founded at the beginning of the twentieth-century, and sought replicate the project with the assistance Walter Rodney. The interconnectedness between Du Bois, Rodney, and the IBW reveals how in the early 1970s intellectual activists launched an assault on

6 Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960 – 1977* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 79 – 113. Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 162 – 168.

7 The Institute of the Black World, "Institute of the Black World: Statement of Purpose and Program." *Negro Digest* 19, no. 5 (1970):19-23.

8 Derrick E. White, *Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 59 – 101.

the emerging post-civil rights system of knowledge. The revised, remixed, and more insidious racial contract effectively marginalized overt discrimination, while leaving the structural and institutional racism untouched. In the 1970s conservatives used a color-blind rhetoric that disarmed systemic analysis of the new racial order by categorizing it unsubstantiated racial complaints or even reverse discrimination against Whites.⁹ The IBW, led primarily by Harding, analyzed the emerging social context to develop new political strategies that would continue the Black Freedom Struggle after King's assassination. "The Institute of the Black World is an experiment in black responsibility for that intellectual work which defines and directs the black community," wrote the IBW's "Statement of Purpose." The call to action continued, "We dare to experiment partly because we remember the words spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr., one year before his assassination, as he memorialized W.E.B. Du Bois. Dr. King said then: 'It was never possible to know where the scholar Du Bois ended and the organizer Du Bois began. The two qualities in him were a single unified force.'" The IBW with the help of Walter Rodney followed in Du Bois' footsteps in analyzing a racial system of knowledge.

While in Atlanta, the IBW, like dreams, functioned in a nonlinear fashion stretching backwards by seeking inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois and stretching forward to address the structural racism and neocolonialism that came to define the 1970s with the assistance of its members and Walter Rodney. These intellectuals sought to understand, explain, and ultimately dismantle a system of knowledge that marginalized Black and working people. The spaces that nurtured and supported intellectual activists are equally important in understanding their quests for self-determination. For Du Bois, the IBW, and Walter Rodney, Atlanta, as home to a network black institutions, provided the necessary intellectual space for committed social engagement.¹⁰ Thus,

9 Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism With Racists: Colorblind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*, 3rd Edition (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2010).

10 Angel David Nieves, "Cultural Landscapes of Resistance and Self-Definition for the Race: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Socio-Spatial Race History," in *"We Shall Independent Be": African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States*, eds. Angel David Nieves and Leslie M. Alexander (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008), 1-22. See also Derrick E. White, *Challenge of Blackness*, 59 - 101.

the IBW represents a location from which scholars can assess the intellectual activism of W.E.B. Du Bois, the Institute of the Black World, and Walter Rodney and how collectively they promoted audacious visions for the 1970s and beyond.

When it was announced to the two hundred and fifty thousand attendees at the 1963 March on Washington that W.E.B. Du Bois had passed away in Ghana. A pall cast over the crowd. Du Bois' death in his 95th year during the March on Washington was a symbolic passing of the torch. The movement had successfully launched an attack on the color line. The ground for the movement's assault on segregation was in part paved by Du Bois' penetrating analysis over the course of the twentieth century.

When Du Bois asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?" He honed in on the problem of the twentieth century - the color line. He spent over six decades analyzing and organizing against the effects of racism. More important, Du Bois identified the "epistemological" dimensions or the system of knowledge that serves as the basis of racism. Philosopher Charles W. Mills notes that the color line or the "racial contract" prescribes for Whites "an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions. . . producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves had made."¹¹ Du Bois sought to explain the racialized world to everyone.

Du Bois' literary brilliance in *Souls of Black Folk* identified the epistemology of ignorance through his usage of the metaphor of the "veil" and "double consciousness." The veil of black skin is both a curse and a blessing, resulting in double consciousness. The fact of blackness creates a tension Du Bois writes, "the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight into this American world. . . ."¹² Du Bois employs African American as a means to discuss how African American's liminal or marginalized position lends itself to special ability to question the normative social order. The limitations of racism thwart Black ambition, according to Du Bois. Yet, Blacks' marginalized position provides special insights to the implicit and explicit workings of America's and the global racial order. While Du Bois' exploration of

11 Mills, *Racial Contract*, 18.

12 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 10.

Blacks' lived experiences in and around the color-line provided a theoretical framework to understand Black life, it was his data collection about Black life conducted and published at Atlanta University that formed the basis of his analysis.¹³

When Du Bois arrived in Atlanta in 1897 he created the Atlanta University Conferences and the subsequent publications as "scientific investigations" on the conditions of Black life. While he admittedly avoided an "emphasis on special reform," the pamphlets did lead to "uplift efforts" such as kindergarten programs in Atlanta, the Negro Business League, and efforts to improve health.¹⁴ The Du Bois-led Atlanta Sociological Laboratory was a key component of "systemic inquiry" designed, as Du Bois noted in his diary, "to raise the race."¹⁵ The Atlanta University Studies were cutting edge social science research. As historian Francille Rusan Wilson has noted that Du Bois's social science research "served as the social scientific basis for his break with Booker T. Washington."¹⁶ The Atlanta University publications were a key model for the Institute of the Black World.

While Harding and Henderson took the organizational lead at the IBW, the organization tried to speak with a single institutional voice. The two AUC faculty members and other key associates, such as political scientist William Strickland, sociologist Joyce Ladner, and historians Lerone Bennett, Jr., Robert Hill, and Howard Dodson created the IBW's public socio-political positions through collective scholarship. For the organization's syndicated column, "Black World View," that ran in Black newspapers, the IBW's associates debated and discussed members' ideas to create an organizational consensus.¹⁷ I have described elsewhere how the organization's collective stance, rather than the individual members, meant the IBW expressed an ideological viewpoint of

13 For detailed analysis of Souls see: Stephanie J. Shaw, *W.E.B. Du Bois and the Souls of Black Folk* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

14 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 214.

15 Earl Wright II, "The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory 1896-1924: A Historical Account of the First American School of Sociology," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 2 (2002):170. Du Bois quoted in Francille Rusan Wilson, *Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890 – 1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 9. The Atlanta University Studies can be found at the W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts: <http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/dubois/?tag=atlantastudies>. Accessed September 4, 2013.

16 Francille Rusan Wilson, *Segregated Scholars*, 30.

17 White, *Challenge of Blackness*, 7, 136 – 165.

pragmatic Black nationalism, emphasizing “the belief that carefully constructed social, political, and economic goals designed to generate consensus in Black communities were more important than ideological pronouncements, conformity, and rigidity.”¹⁸ The IBW’s pragmatism allowed it to experiment with programs, strategies, and analyses in its more than a decade of existence. Over the course of the 1970s, the IBW developed programmatic efforts that included supporting the creation of Black Studies programs, initiating a Black political agenda for the decade, and establishing a network of Black scholar-activists from across the diaspora that constantly pushed the organization to rethink its positions.

Plans for the IBW began when the AUC-based professors, Harding and Henderson, developed a Black Studies program for the AUC and evaluated emerging Black Studies programs nationally. Atlanta University Center faculty members Harding, Henderson, Gerald McWorter, A.B. Spellman, and Council Taylor proposed the creation of The W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Advanced Afro-American Studies. The authors of the Du Bois Institute proposal argued that the AUC curriculum did not have enough Black Studies classes and recommended the hiring additional professors for these new courses. The authors also suggested that the AUC was an excellent location “to institutionalize the present surge of interest in the Black world” The Institute planned to produce research similar to the Atlanta University publications on Blacks led by Du Bois from 1897 - 1910. Overall, the proposed connection between the Du Bois Institute, the King Center, and AUC would possibly allow the Historically Black Colleges to “leap into an internationally celebrated status of pre-eminence and distinction, for having responded creatively and vigorously to the greatest domestic crisis of our nation in recent history.”¹⁹ When the Du Bois Institute was re-named the Institute of the Black World, Harding moved the nascent organization into Du Bois’ old

18 Ibid. 8.

19 White, *Challenge of Blackness*, 19-58. “Proposal for the creation of: The W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Advanced Afro-American Studies,” IBW Papers, IBW at King Center subseries. “Administrative Structure and Lines of Authority, proposed, 30 May 1969,” at Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Vincent Harding Papers, Box 13, folder 2, Robert W. Woodruff Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, (hereafter Vincent Harding Papers). “Models of Relationship to the Institute of the Black World,” Vincent Harding Papers, Box 13, folder 4.

house on the edge of the AUC campus.

The IBW's first eighteen months were spent on establishing Black Studies courses at the AUC and evaluating other Black Studies programs nationwide. The IBW associates agreed to lead Black Studies classes in 1969, while the AUC colleges' administrations worked on starting a program or department. Before the plans for a Black Studies program was created, however, students led a sit-in at Morehouse College, demanding that African Americans control of the curriculum, the board of directors, and the school's financial resources. Several of the IBW associates, including Gerald McWorter a co-author of the Du Bois Institute proposal, participated in the protest. The support for the protest caused the AUC schools to sever its relationship with the IBW. After the sit-in at Morehouse, the IBW associates moved to evaluate national Black Studies programs by organizing the Black Studies Directors Conference in November 1969. In months before the IBW officially opened its offices in January 1970, the organization had become a leader in the Black Studies movement. Despite the importance of the IBW's role in development of Black Studies, associates pushed it focus more on Black politics.²⁰

As Black Studies became increasingly institutionalized inside universities and colleges nationwide, the IBW's associates turned their attention towards the 1972 presidential election. The IBW used its network of associates to develop a Black political agenda aimed at Democrats and Republicans and at Black communities. The IBW's shift away from Black Studies programs and toward Black politics in the post-civil rights era marked the organization embodying the role of a traditional think tank. The IBW's creation of a Black political agenda paralleled the work of advocacy think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation.²¹ The institute's work coincided with the emergence of the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. The Gary Convention, as it was known, brought together Black politicians and activists together to forge a Black political agenda. The IBW's associates, Vincent Harding, William Strickland, and Lerone Bennett, Jr. played important roles in crafting the convention's "Preamble,"

²⁰ White, *Challenge of Blackness*, 19-58.

²¹ Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter?: Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 31 – 34.

which outlined the goals and direction of the meeting. The Gary Convention crafted what for many was a contradictory agenda as it tried to accommodate activists and politicians. For example, many activists had begun to oppose busing as a measure to achieve integrated schools, because they saw the logistics that more often than not forced Black children on long bus rides as discriminatory and they disagreed with logic that implied that segregated Black schools were educationally inferior. Newly elected Black officials and members of mainstream civil rights organizations refused to support this position, viewing it as a rejection of the civil rights movement and capitulation to White racism. William Strickland believed Black communities nationwide needed to debate the individual agenda items so the document would be truly representative, and would encourage elected officials to stand with their constituencies. Leaders of the National Black Political Convention disagreed, and published an activist agenda that failed to garner the support of elected officials. Despite the call for unity, Black activists, intellectuals, and politicians were more divided about the future than before the 1972 National Black Political Convention. There was little consensus on Black vision for the future, but the Strickland, on behalf of the IBW, had proposed a democratic plan to unify competing political, economic, and social agendas. Despite the disappointment, the IBW associates turned their attention to Atlanta politics, working to elect Atlanta's first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson. In crafting a political agenda, the IBW tried to reconcile activists and politicians' agendas. The organization's political work continued its Black pragmatic dreams.²²

Although Black Studies and Black politics were among the IBW initial interests, the organization also developed a diasporic analysis with the assistance of scholars from the Caribbean and Africa. In fact, the diasporic focus and the willingness to consider alternatives to nonviolence were several reasons that led to a parting of ways between the Institute and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in September 1970. Associates purposefully consulted Black intellectuals who held an assortment of ideological perspectives. These consultations raised the IBW associates' awareness of diverse

22 Ibid., 102-136. See also, Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation*, 159-218; and Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 85-130.

analytical perspectives and arguments beyond the simplistic dichotomy of integration and separation. In developing a broader analysis the IBW began working with several intellectuals from and working in Jamaica.

In particular, the IBW worked with historian Robert Hill, economist George Beckford, and Guyanese historian Walter Rodney. In 1969, the Jamaican government refused to allow Rodney, who was teaching at the University of the West Indies, to reenter the country after attending a Black Power conference in Montreal. When word of Rodney's detainment spread to the University of West Indies students and to the Rastafari community protests ensued. Hill, Beckford, and others scholar-activists formed the newspaper *Abeng* to analyze the Rodney affair, the crises in Jamaican politics, and the ruling Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) from the perspective of the Jamaican working class. According to *Abeng* cofounder George Beckford, "The political response to the JLP repression took many forms. There were various nationalist groups and organizations, many of which came together behind the *Abeng* [sic] newspaper. Radical intellectuals of middle-class backgrounds formed many of these groups. Through them, the militancy of the Black Power Movement in the U.S.A. and the revolutionary slogans of the National Liberation Movements of the world, fed into mass struggle."²³ By 1970, Robert Hill had become an associate at the IBW connecting the Atlanta-based organization with the wider Caribbean intellectual scene.

In the mid-1970s, the IBW sought Walter Rodney's expert racial and economic analysis. Ideological divisions over race and class plagued the Black freedom struggle, causing confusion among concerned intellectual activists. As the ideological divisions deepened among Black activists, few found common ground and more became increasingly rigid and doctrinaire in their interpretations. Such divisions undermined the Pan-African unity previously displayed in the African Liberation Day (ALD), which saw tens of thousands, including the IBW's Vincent Harding, protest colonial rule in May 1972. Political scientist Cedric Johnson describes the Pan-African protests as "the largest, post-World War II demonstrations concerning Africa affairs held in North

23 Quoted in Robert A. Hill, "From New World to Abeng: George Beckford and the Horn of Black Power in Jamaica, 1968 – 1970," *Small Axe* 11, no. 3 (October 2007): 6.

America.”²⁴ Unfortunately, within two years, ALD was beset by internal squabbling and dissent over whether race or class was the best form of analysis and organizing. The IBW contacted Rodney to help it navigate the race/class ideological split.

The IBW invited Rodney to be the key participant in its five-week 1974 Summer Research Symposium. Before the symposium, the IBW had begun to expand its analysis beyond race, by examining the political economy and structural racism. The symposium employed “the theory and methodology of political economy as a frame of reference for analyzing Black American social, economic, and political development” and used the theory to study the “contemporary situation of black people” in the United States and the diaspora. Participants studied Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* as an analytical model. Howard University Press had published Rodney’s historical treatise earlier in 1974. Both Rodney’s neocolonial analysis and his development theory relied on a Marxist theory of political economy. Systemic inequality, for Rodney, was derived from Western capitalistic exploitation and petit-bourgeoisie manipulation. His use of Marxism appealed to IBW associates because of its non-dogmatic quality and his strong reliance on empirical evidence to produce theory. Rodney’s flexibility in approaching class analysis stood out against the backdrop of the increasingly doctrinaire Marxism emerging in the 1970s.²⁵

Rodney gave a series of lectures for symposium participants and the Atlanta community. In his lecture “Politics of the African Ruling Class,” Rodney demonstrated his nuanced approach to race and class analysis. He argued that the post-colonial African ruling class was actually a governing class supported by former colonial powers or capitalists in colonial metropolises. The inability for newly independent African leadership to shape the national economy or the economic productive forces in their countries opened the leadership to sharp criticism from leftists. In order to maintain control amid economic powerlessness and harsh criticisms from labor activists the African ruling class resorted to violence against its critics. The desire for the ruling class to maintain control over the state and its use of the state apparatus to squash

24 Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, 142.

25 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974).

opposition led to, according to Rodney, the dramatic rise of one-party states across Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rodney's analysis was extremely useful for the IBW associates who were navigating the race-class ideological split that was weakening Black organizations in the mid-1970s.

Later, Rodney also conducted private "roundtable discussions" with the IBW associates about the role of intellectual activists. He believed that the dogmatic style used by both sides of the ideological was a product of the failure to find common ground. "[T]he style of the debate" had such intensity that it was "near violence almost, where some people seem to line up on one side or another, I feel that the form has sometimes assumed more importance than the substance." The two positions, he continued, are "unnecessarily antagonistic."²⁶ Rodney told the IBW associates of his experiences with race in Guyana. Located on the northern coast of South America, Guyana was a country divided between Africans and East Indians. Rodney noted, "So for many Guyanese, when the word race is used, they don't think about the question of white domination and white values and so on. That is important, but by and large they mean this confrontation between Africans and Indians."²⁷ Rodney noted that this division was politicized in wake of the country's independence in 1966. The People's Progressive Party (PPP) was founded as a multi-ethnic socialist party in the 1950s, but by the time of independence was known as the Indian party. The People's National Congress (PNC) under the leadership of former PPP member Forbes Burnham claimed to represent the Afro-Guyanese. Rodney described the political and ethnic circumstances, as making "it extremely difficult for any progressive, African or Indian, to intervene in the Guyanese situation, because it was already so formed that the moment one intervened, one was doing so in a ready-made contest of Indian versus African." Rodney wanted Guyanese politics to move beyond this "racial" interpretation and look at how class operated in the country. He noted that the change in the racial composition of Guyanese political leadership from Indian to African-descent did not alleviate the suffocating poverty that defined too many of the masses. Rather than racialized political interpretations, Rodney

26 Robert Hill, ed. *Walter Rodney Speaks* (Trenton: Third World Press, 1990), 96.

27 "The Politicization of Race in Guyana: A Conversation with Walter Rodney," *Black World View*, 1, no. 4 (1976), 8.

wanted “African and Indian people to organize around their interests as producers in the Guyanese society as distinct from pursuing this myth of racial superiority or subjugation.”²⁸

Rodney ultimately tried to translate his analysis into organized action with the creation of the Working Peoples Alliance, a third party designed to change Guyanese society. After the University of Guyana abruptly withdrew Rodney’s teaching position in the mid-1970s, the IBW network found teaching and lecturing opportunities that allowed him to support his family. Rodney’s vast network of colleagues and supporters encouraged him to leave Guyana sensing the danger from Burnham’s PNC. Rodney’s response was: “It is imperative that I stay here.” By late 1979 and early 1980 the situation in Guyana escalated; Rodney and other WPA members were arrested and charged with arson on a government building. On June 13, 1980, Rodney was assassinated.

By the time of Rodney’s murder, the IBW, financially struggling, was a shell of its former self, but it sought to explain and promote Rodney’s legacy. Howard Dodson organized a teach-in for the Atlanta community to understand Rodney’s legacy and genius.²⁹ Vincent Harding, Robert Hill, and William Strickland wrote a new introduction for the 1982 Howard University Press edition of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. The IBW associates concluded: “Now it is in our hands - to overcome our history, to break the shackles of the past, to re-develop ourselves, our people, our nation and our world - to find humane, creative and fearless ways of dealing with those who presently oppose such development. These are audacious visions, and truly awesome responsibilities.”³⁰

The “audacious visions” that stretched from W.E.B. Du Bois to the Institute of the Black World and Walter Rodney reveal the importance of intellectual activism and the need for critical space to research, theorize, and organize. The space is essential for the success of protest movements. Protests, struggle, and activism must be supported by indisputable facts and well-reasoned arguments. Du Bois used Atlanta University to

28 Ibid., 9.

29 “‘Teach-In’ Set at the Institute of the Black World,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 18, 1980, 3.

30 Vincent Harding, Robert Hill, and William Strickland, Introduction to *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, rev. ed. by Walter Rodney (Howard University Press, 1982), xxiv.

collect the empirical data that shaped his analysis. The conferences he organized not only collected data, but also set out to use this information for the improvement of the race. Du Bois recalled, “I was not thinking of mere conferences. I was thinking of a comprehensive plan for study a human group.”³¹ The IBW set out to follow Du Bois’ blueprint, using the AUC and the King Center to support the study of Black scholarship and political analysis. When the IBW became independent, its more ambitious plans for intellectual work were greatly assisted by Rodney. Inspired by Rodney’s calls for “groundings,” the IBW developed a concept of intellectual work rooted in the “colonized situation of the masses of the black community in America.”³²

The IBW also provided Rodney a base for intellectual activism in the United States. Rodney’s analysis of neocolonialism was rooted in his experiences as a scholar-activist and it was useful to the Institute of the Black World trying to understand the post-civil rights landscape of Black elected officials, civil rights spokespersons, Black nationalists, and Socialist activists. Similar to the post-colonial world, the post-civil rights landscape required revised analyses. The IBW with the help of Walter Rodney carried out Du Bois’ legacy of applied scholarly activism. More important, the trajectory outlined by W.E.B. Du Bois, the IBW, and Walter Rodney provide examples on the responsibility for the next generations of intellectual-activists who desire to create a more humane world. As Harding, Hill, and Strickland noted, “Anything less is inadequate for the perilous times. Anything less would be unworthy of the memory of our brother, the needs of our children, or the magnificent, untapped capacities of our own selves.”³³

31 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Conception* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1940, 2011), 63 – 64.

32 Vincent Harding, “The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community,” in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, ed. The Institute of the Black World (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 6.

33 Ibid.

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